

6. Design Context for Planning

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Catonsville today is the result of many changes - from rural village, to streetcar suburb to modern suburb. Its location attracted two groups: the first, businessmen who served travelers as well as local residents on Frederick Road; the second, people looking for housing - at first in country estates, and later in suburban homes. The citizens of Catonsville 2000 have expressed their desire to retain this village character of their community. Before planning can take place for the future, it is necessary to analyze existing conditions to discover the factors that contribute to the village character and opportunities for further reinforcing that character. The primary focus area, as defined by the community, was analyzed in terms of its land use and physical characteristics to find problems and opportunities, and to determine future guidelines for growth.

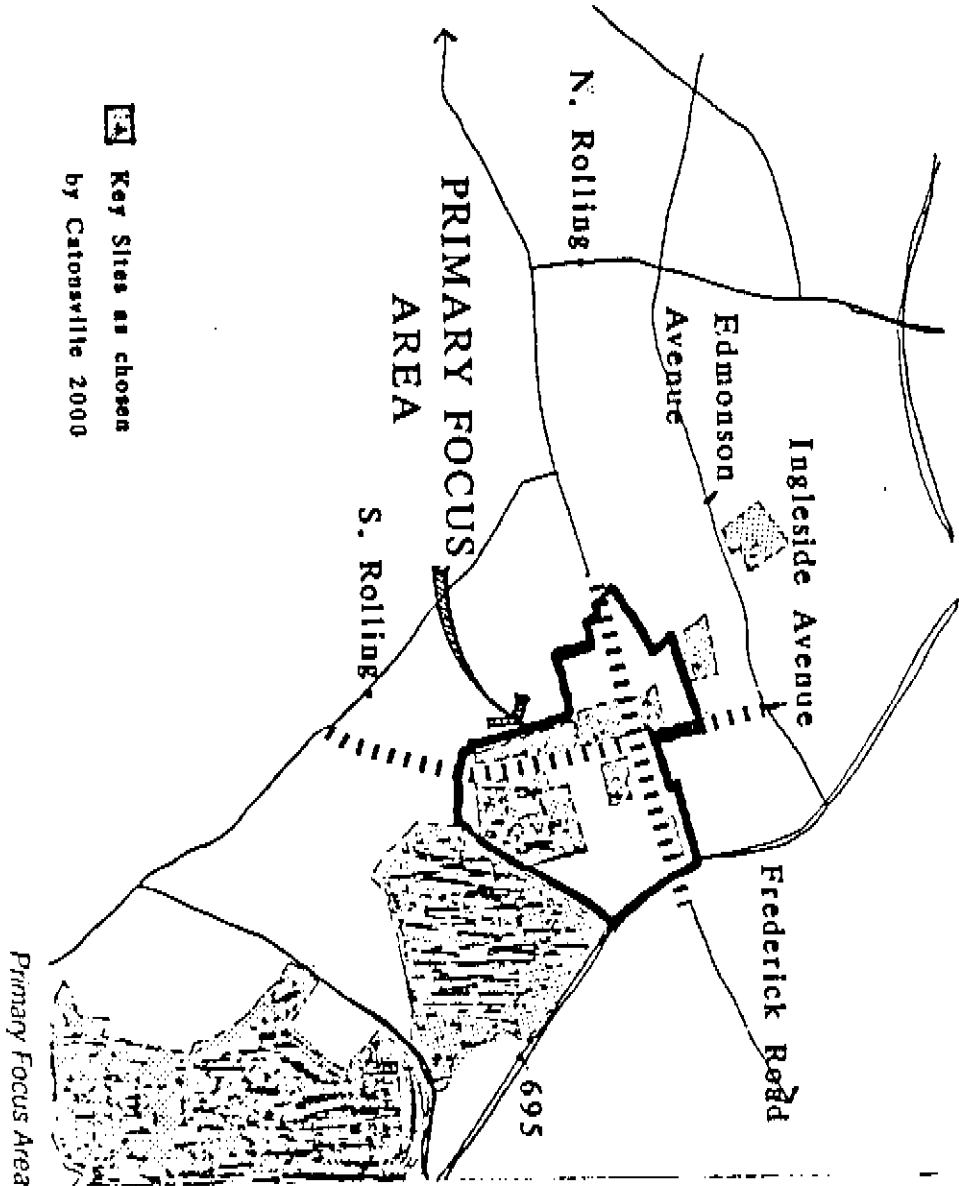
Land Use:

The primary focus area contains three general land uses: Commercial, Residential, and Public/Institutional.

Commercial uses are primarily located along Frederick Road, the main thoroughfare. As built, this commercial space falls into two physical types:

1. The older, commercial buildings placed close to the street.
2. The newer buildings, set further back from the street.

These two types of buildings form two very distinct characters along Frederick Road. The "village core", as it is called, is the area of older buildings, mostly two to three stories in height.



In many ways, it is unchanged since the early 1900's. However, many building fronts have been extended and additional signage has been added. This has resulted in narrow 8' sidewalks and a visual jumble. A few buildings have been demolished leaving vacant space along the street.

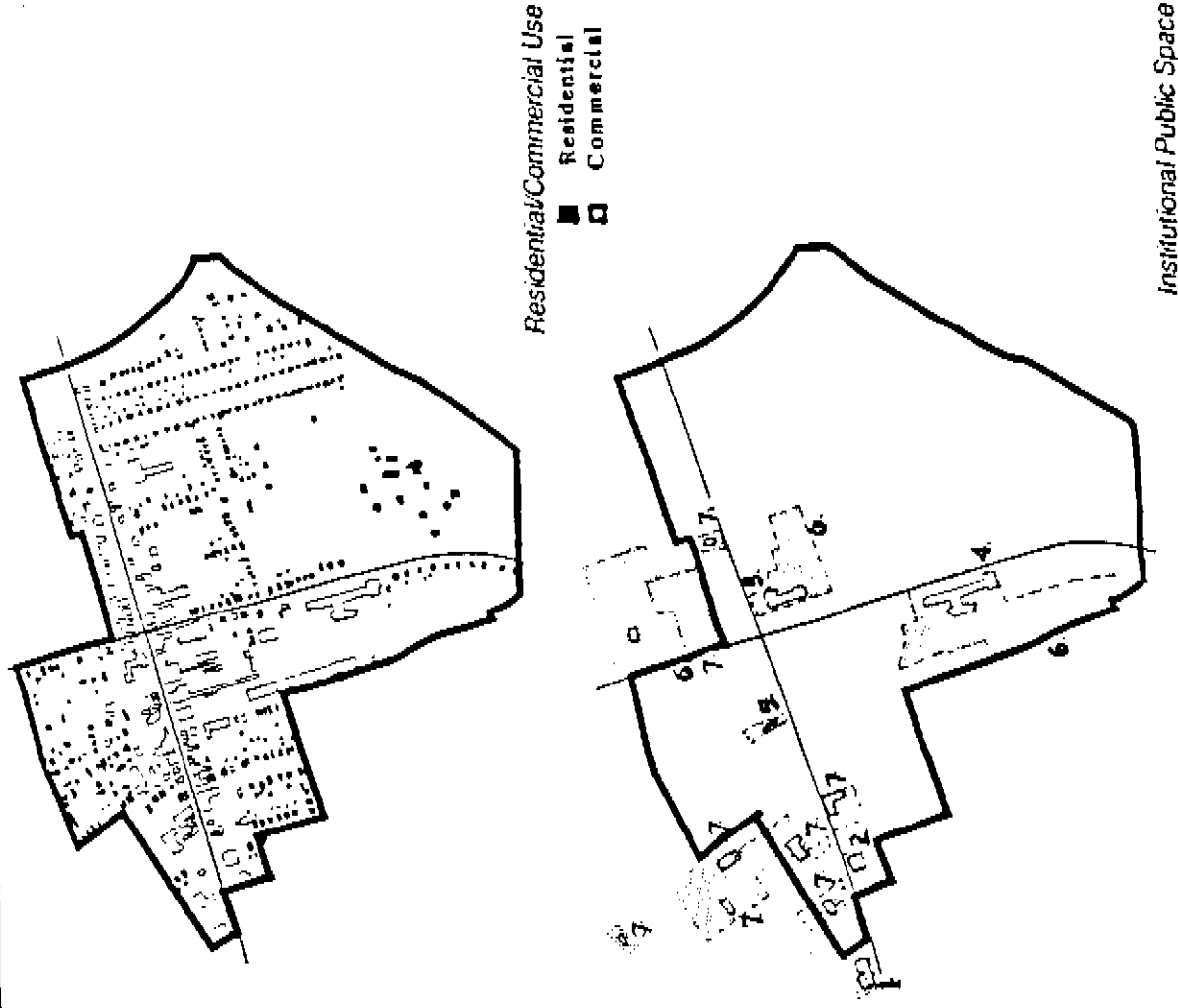
The area of newer buildings resembles what is commonly called "a strip". The old village character has been replaced by auto-oriented stores with parking in front and buildings set back from the street. The space between buildings is larger and they are often only one story in height.

Residential areas come quite close to Frederick Road and in fact some houses still exist there. This occurs mostly towards the edges of the primary focus area, though many of the older commercial buildings were at one time houses. These houses reinforce the village character.

Public and institutional uses occupy a large proportion of the primary focus area. A wide range of services are available, including:

1. The public library.
2. The post office.
3. An elementary school.
4. A former middle school (now offices)
5. A fire house.
6. Recreation fields.
7. Many churches.

These uses reinforce the feeling of community and differentiate the area from surrounding strip commercial areas.

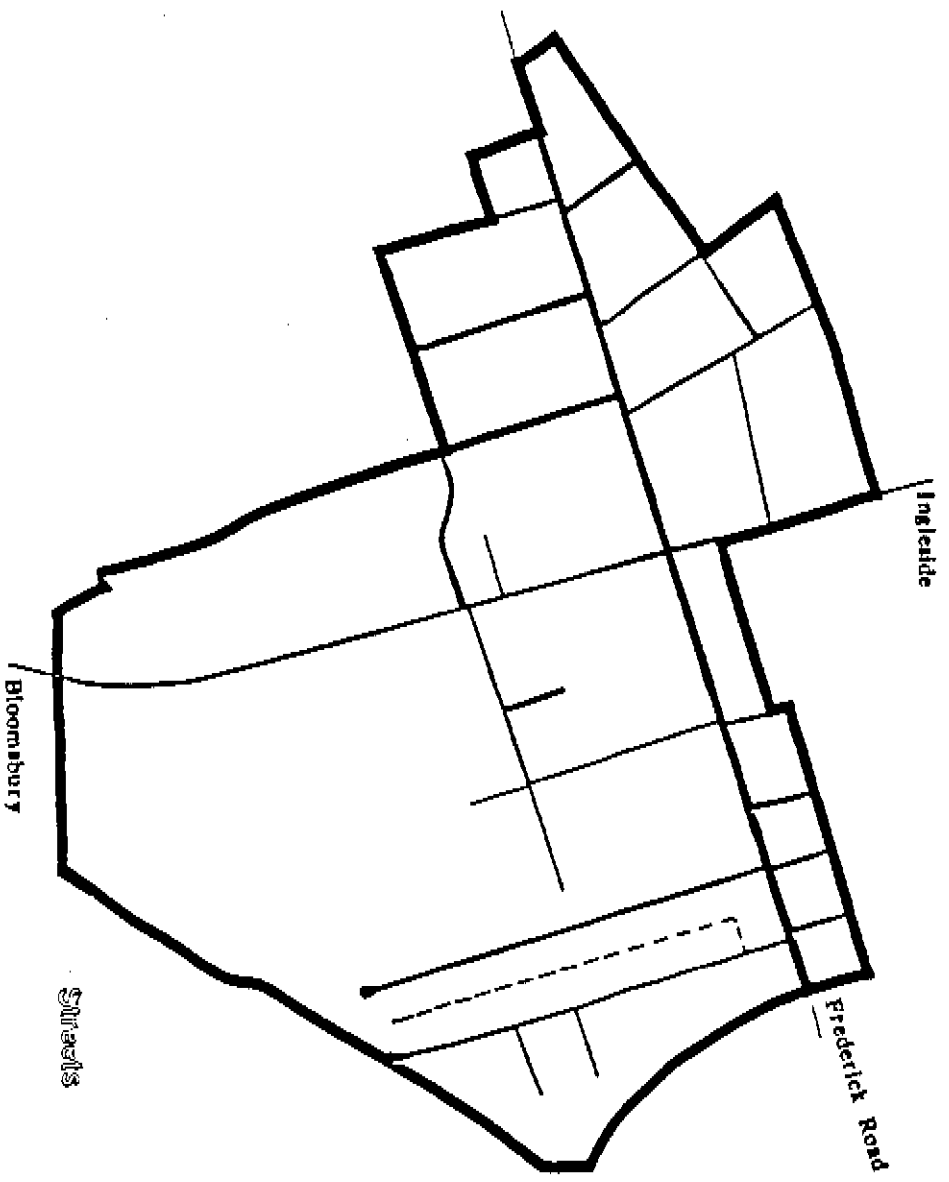
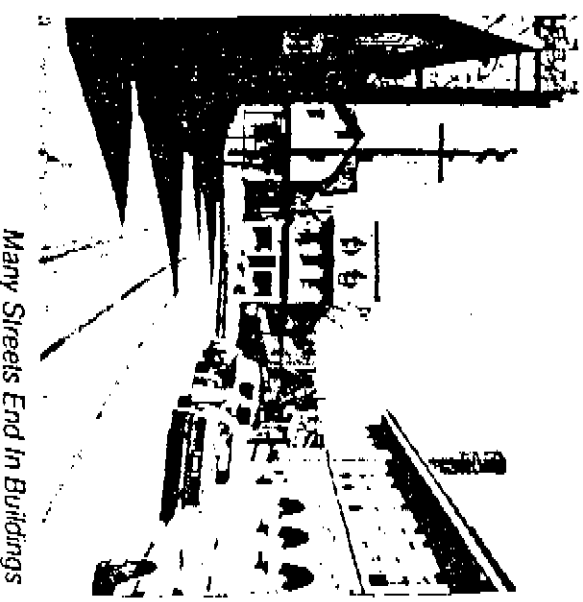


Physical Characteristics:

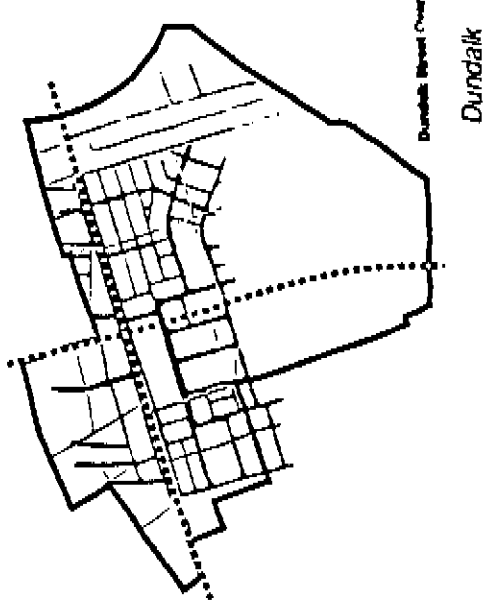
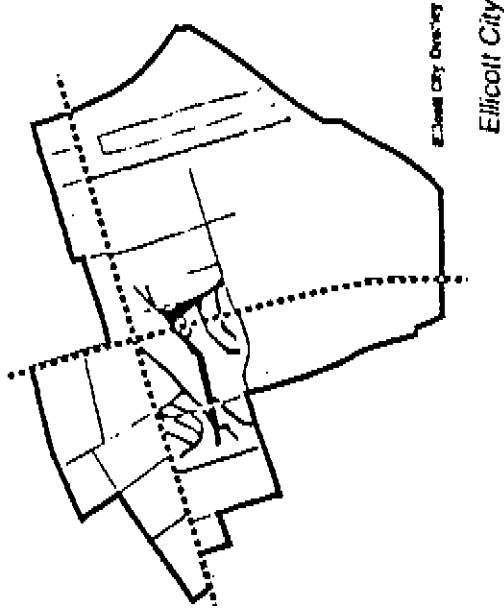
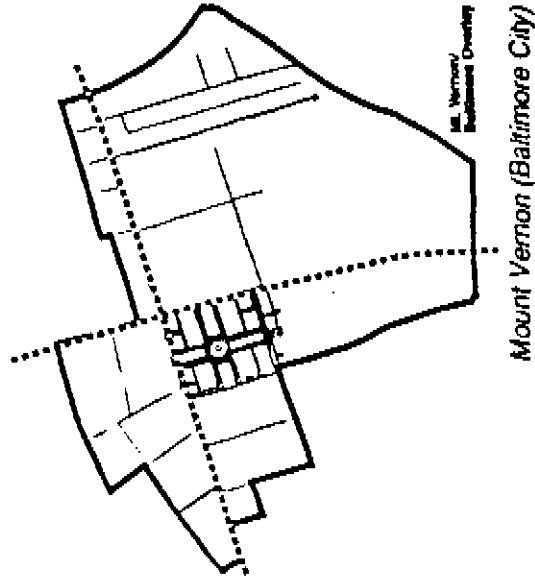
Street and Blocks

Catonsville has a unique street pattern, derived from its historical development from a summer community of large houses and later a streetcar suburb. The pattern of streets has two primary identifiable characteristics:

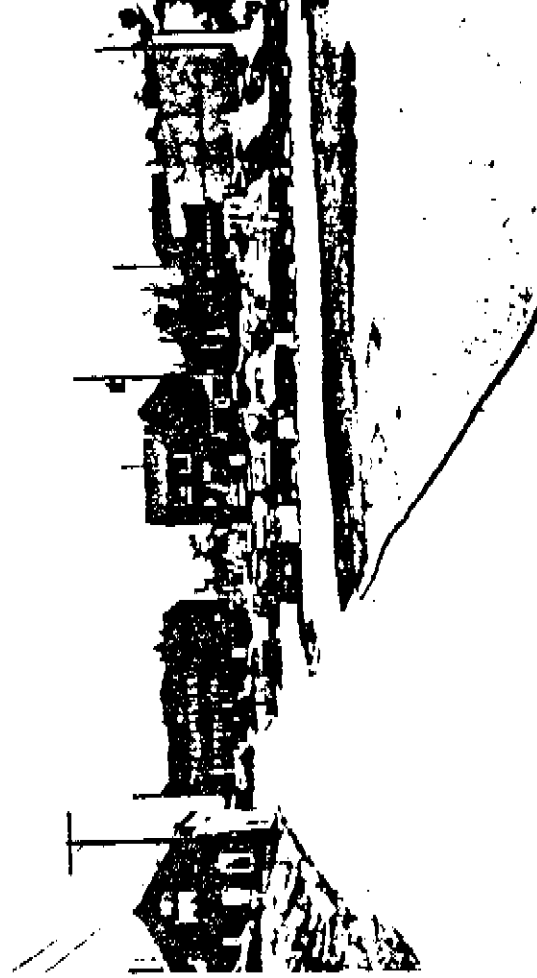
1. Many north-south streets are discontinuous and dead end into Frederick Road. As mentioned in the traffic section, this brings many cars in the neighborhood to Frederick Road. This is good for retail business, although it also promotes congestion as through traffic mixes with local traffic.



Streets



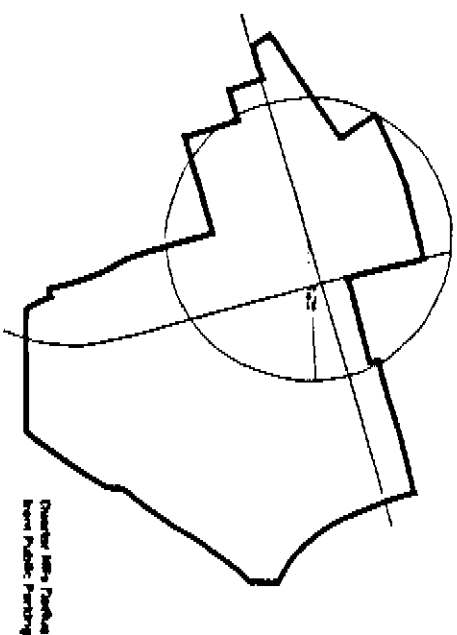
2. Block sizes are large in comparison with other towns and cities. This results in less street frontage, which also means less of a network for cars or people to circulate in. As can be seen in the comparisons with Baltimore City (Mount Vernon Square), Ellicott City, and Dundalk, Calonsville is certainly less compact and less dense. Street widths, however, are not generous. This provides a small scale environment, but also means that new traffic patterns have to be carefully considered so as not to overload the system.



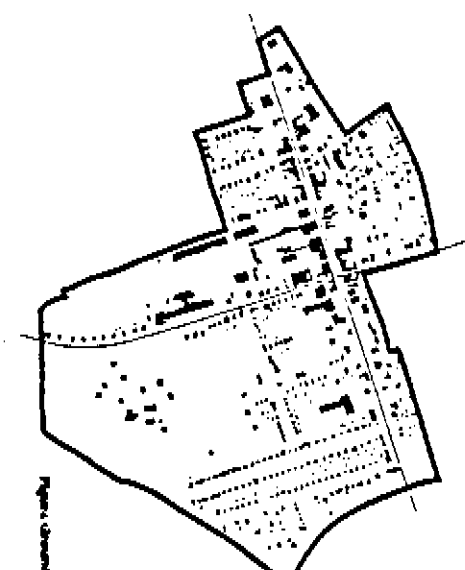
Typical unstructured block "interior" and narrow street.

Historic Structures

The buildings of Calonsville vary widely in historic style. In the village core itself, most buildings still existing were built between 1880 and 1930. Some are homes converted to shops, while others were built as stores. Some buildings are of stone, like the old stone mill office at the corner of Frederick and Bloomsbury, now a bookstore; others are of brick or wood. In the village core area, about 40 percent of the commercial buildings are historic. In both cases, through changes in ownership, storefronts have been "updated" periodically.



1/4 Mile Radius



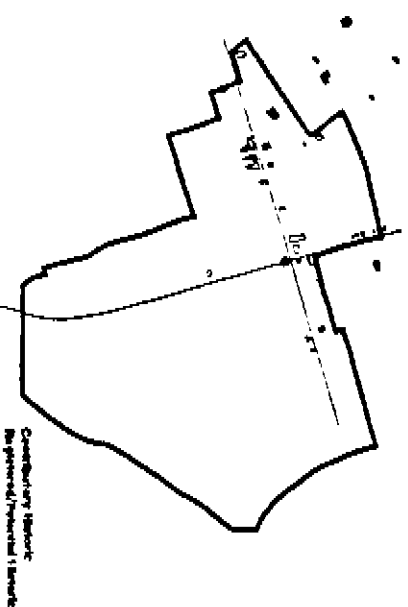
Figure/Ground

Walking Distance

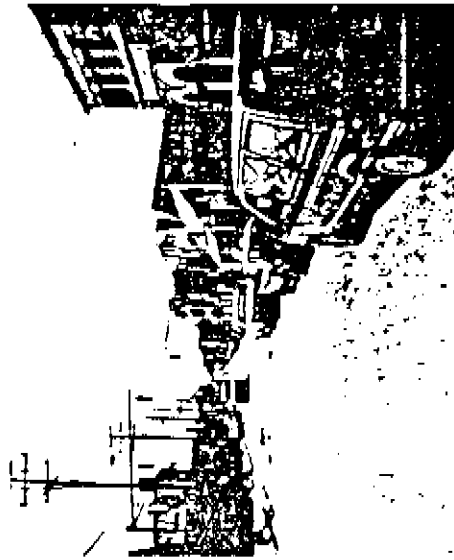
Walking distance, usually defined as a 1/4 mile radius from any given point, is an important ingredient in a village retail area. In Calonsville, this circle placed with its center at the existing public parking lot extends from just east of the Ingleside/Frederick intersection to east of the post office. This suggests it is well located for the village area. It is also of interest and appropriate that this circle encompasses most of the village core.

Figure/Ground

The physical character of a place is primarily created by the way buildings are grouped together. The varying characters along Frederick Road with buildings closer to the street and buildings set back from the street are evident in the figure ground. The very low density in the vicinity of the village core behind Frederick Road uses is also evident.



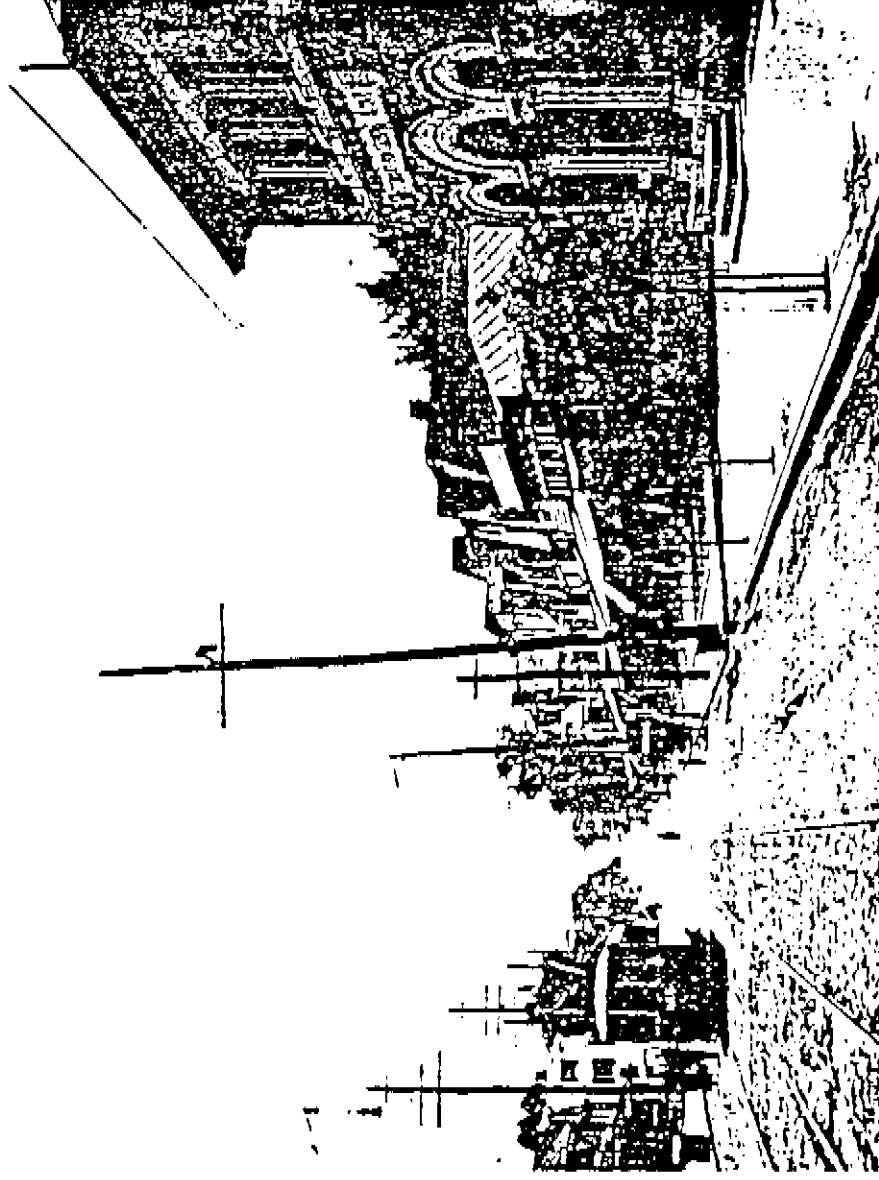
Historic Buildings



Today

Historic Character/Streetscape

Frederick Road is the "main street" of Catonsville. Being the route to the west, the Frederick Turnpike became a state road in 1910; horsecar tracks were laid in 1862 and trolley tracks in 1895. Though these have disappeared, many of the developments they spawned have remained. Historically, the streetscape was dominated by awnings forming an arcade along the north side of the street. The sidewalks were wider, as many storefronts had not yet been extended. Today the predominant streetscape feature is storefront-type base of various styles with residential scale windows above and a hodge-podge of signage. Another "modern" feature are the telephone poles lining the south side of the street.



Yesterday

Analysis Conclusions

The analysis of the physical characteristics of Calonsville reveals a community with many assets in the process of change.

1. The village character is not consistent along Frederick Road at present. Three building patterns exist. The village character and small scale pattern should be reinforced and further erosion should be stopped.
2. Preservation of existing historic structures should be encouraged in the village core.
3. The historic character of many older buildings has been obscured by modern additions and signage.
4. The density of development in the primary focus area is low and could be increased in the village core.
5. Street density is low. This has resulted in the creation of many private driveways. An increased street density in the village core would help rationalize parking.
6. More north/south through streets will help reduce traffic congestion at the Ingleside/Frederick intersection.
7. The size of the village core is good for walking.
8. There is a high proportion of public and civic institutions in Calonsville which contribute to the village character.